



# Homeland Security

## Fact Sheet

### The Visa Waiver Program and Biometric and Machine-Readable Passport Requirements

Visa Waiver Program (VWP) travel will soon be affected by several changes concerning passports valid for travel to the United States and U.S. port of entry processing. These measures are aimed at improving security and facilitation of travel. Additionally, the deadline by which VWP countries must produce biometric passports has been delayed for one year.

The following 27 countries are currently in the VWP: Andorra, Austria, Australia, Belgium, Brunei, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom (for citizens with the unrestricted right of permanent abode in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man).

#### **US-VISIT AND VWP VISITORS**

Starting September 30, 2004, US-VISIT procedures will be expanded to include visitors traveling to the United States under the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) arriving at airports and seaports of entry.

US-VISIT provides a means by which to verify the identity of travelers through the use of biometric technology. Digital, inkless finger scans and digital photographs provide the Department of Homeland Security a better means to check, using biometric and biographic data, against watch lists and screen for fraudulent documents. These measures improve the Department of Homeland Security's ability to make admissibility decisions.

An estimated 13 million visitors from Visa Waiver Countries enter the U.S. each year. Travelers from Visa Waiver Countries are allowed to apply for entry to the U.S. on a passport for up to 90 days for business or pleasure without obtaining a visa.

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## **MACHINE- READABLE AND BIOMETRIC PASSPORT DEADLINES**

### **Machine-Readable Passports**

On October 26, 2004, all passports presented for VWP travel are required to be machine-readable.

Last year, the Secretary of State granted a postponement from October 1, 2003, until October 26, 2004, as the date by which Visa Waiver Program travelers from 21 countries must present a machine-readable passport to be admitted to the United States without a visa. Five eligible countries did not request a postponement of the effective date. Belgium was not eligible to request a waiver.

Each traveler will be required to have an individual machine-readable passport. Children will not be able to travel on their parent's passports.

### **Biometrically Enabled Passports**

In August 2004, President Bush signed legislation (H.R. 4417) that extends by one year, to October 26, 2005, the requirement for VWP countries to issue biometrically enabled passports. Passports issued on or after that date will be required to be biometrically enabled to be valid for use in VWP travel.

This extension was necessary to avoid potential disruption of international travel and provide the international community adequate time to develop viable programs for producing a more secure, biometrically enabled passport. The original legislation required that Visa Waiver Program country passports issued on or after October 26, 2004 be biometrically enabled for use in Visa Waiver travel.

Although the addition of biometrics to the U.S. passport is not covered by Congressional mandate, the Department of State has been working diligently towards developing U.S. biometric passports. The United States recognizes the benefits of biometric identity verification and strives to remain at the forefront of international travel document security. By the end of 2005, all domestically produced U.S. passports will be biometric passports.

For more information on US-VISIT, please visit at [www.dhs.gov/us-visit](http://www.dhs.gov/us-visit).

For more information on the VWP, please visit [http://travel.state.gov/visa/tempvisitors\\_novisa\\_waiver.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/tempvisitors_novisa_waiver.html).